

Masks

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Summary: She and he were nothing alike - Jellal knew this, so why did he let her get to him? Council Jeltar. Rated M for safety but nothing that really warrants it.

Masks

****A/N:**** I wasn't going to post this but I realize it's hard to find jeltar fics. Let me know what you guys think. Set directly after Galuna.

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><p>Masks

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><p>Willing myself to concentrate on the book before me, I peered at the pages, eyes unfocused and mind fixated on something else more puzzling than the ancient script before me, dry and dull with age, crumbling away from modern knowledge into obscurity.<p>

It was late, as it often was, and I preferred the solitude and quiet that the velvet darkness provided, the staff long since gone and the other members having retired in deference to their age. Those old fools, long past the age of retirement and stubborn as mules in their backwards ways. My lip twitched a little, breaking the mask across my face that soured into a full frown with my brows furrowed rebelliously.

Glancing at the clock, I idly levitated a few priceless, fragile items in the room out of their pristine cases, bored and wishing to be doing other things. Waiting always got to me.

Waiting for her was even worse. She was there, always there, when

needed, but more often than not, she'd fade away then return. On errands at my discretion, certainly, but I could not help but suspect there was more. Her facade, I must admit with a little sting, was nearly flawless "as good as my own" but I had resources she did not, and contrary to her silly notions, I lured her in not the other way around.

The saying was keep your friends close and your enemies closer, and I'd yet to ascertain which one she was to me. Certainly, she was biddable enough in both business and personal matters, and oddly enough, I enjoyed her company beyond that as well. She was intelligent, well-read and witty, when she wanted to be... and that was when her mask slipped, when the sheets were slick and the air heady, both our heads thrown back on the pillows in a mixture of satiation and exhaustion.

Shifting my legs at that particular train of thought, I swirled a delicate pattern with my fingers, bidding glass globes to dance at my command, mocking the heavens and my powers over them. How small they were in comparison.

She was late. Much too late. It was particular given her prior punctuality with our appointments, which made me concerned... this should have been a simple mission, yet she had not returned.

She couldn't fail or disappear until I solved her words those first night, the ones she whispered with hitched breaths of poorly concealed need and coy arrogance. Before her lips fell upon me and her body played so well beneath my questing fingers, before I allowed myself to slip into the persona I'd cultivated solely for the purpose of a reputation.

We were nothing alike.

How dare she presume that we were? Those innocuous words taunted me, intrigued me, and were ultimately what kept her from being tossed to the side as her predecessors were. I could not let her go until I understood their meaning; I could not let go until I laid to rest the quiet, nagging voice that kept me awake a night, questioning my morals, questioning my sanity, questioning my path. Somehow, I sensed she was the key to unlocking this mystery, yet that was absurd.

How could some no-account woman hold any sway over my life?

Sighing as the glass balls rained down around me, I turned back to the text, vexed and shifting restlessly as the minutes dragged by. Giving in, I sent my magic out, seeking and questing just as the door creaked open behind me. Immediately, her presence washed over me, and I was fortunate to have my back to her; if she wished to play with masks, we'd play with masks.

"That was quite the disappointment with Deliora," she breezed in, as if she weren't late, as if she hadn't caused me to wait on her, as if she hadn't stirred a small measure of concern for her. Viciously, I smashed all those feelings down, focusing on her words and not her mocking voice, deriding herself and her mission both. "I thought, if we could acquire it, we would be one step closer to our goals."

Our. How presumptuous.

I flicked the book shut with a careless, flippant motion, smirking, and sent the priceless old volume across the room to rest neatly in its spot, careful as if it were a babe placed in a cradle. If my peacockery had any effect at all, she didn't show it, choosing to move gracefully towards me in her kimono. Sandals clacked softly with her small, measured steps. Turning, I smirked and leaned forward in the chair.

"It cannot be helped," I shrugged arrogantly, turning to give her a once over, lingering on her attire, considering her choice and wondering if she'd chosen it just for me. "How were we to know the demon had already perished?"

She threw a careless arm out in response, her face twisted up mockingly; I noticed a slight tremor in the motion. Eyes narrowing, my previous thoughts about later flew out of my head. Ultear was not given to trembling, even when lingering on the cusp, any more than she was tardy.

"I'm sorry, Siegrain-sama," she remarked with a tidy bow of her head, dark hair spilling over her shoulders and bangs shielding her eyes from me. Bitterness tinged her painted lips, betraying her, as she sneered, "Who knew that woman's magic was so powerful?"

That woman. I nearly laughed â€" nearly but not quite- at how simple it all was. Of course, that woman. Ur Milkovich. I'd done research on her, certainly; the Council tended to keep tabs on powerful mages of interest, so the information was easy to find. It was even easier to find certain... things... about Miss Ultear Milkovich as well, although there were large gaps in the records after the age of six.

She never told, and I never asked. Just as I never spoke of the time I spent in the Tower, although I often murmured meaningless and mundane things about my life in Era in her ear. It was her who bared her secrets willingly, as if she actually trusted me, as if I were her lover rather than her... what? What were we exactly? More than business partners, less than lovers, certainly not friends with benefits.

It was she who whispered soft, shameful, bitter confessions about the one person in her life who betrayed her, who scarred her, who abandoned her â€" who died, forsaken and frozen in time, cutting off any chance of closure, any chance of redemption.

Resting my cheek on my knuckles, I decided to make light of the situation as best I could, unsure what words to offer that wouldn't ring false or phoney. My muscles moved to get up, to go to her, to offer a simple comfort of sympathy, and I clamped down on the chair until my knuckles turned white. That would not do; that would not do at all.

"Now, now," I clicked my tongue in a soft tsk, relaxing my shoulders to show I meant no harm and eyeing her from the side to gauge her reaction, "Is that any way to speak of your mother? Tears of Ur, Ultear. I highly respect your mother; after all, had she lived, she undoubtedly would have been one of the Ten Wizard Saints." Unable to help myself, I brandished the authoritative metal that I kept close to my chest, large and important. It dangled on the chain tauntingly with her dark eyes following it, glancing between it and my face.

Fearlessly, I gazed back, silently daring her to speak against me, pushing and digging at her to get a reaction other than that ugly mask she hid behind.

Hissing, her dark eyes slid away from me to the side as she crossed her arms haughtily across her chest to hide her discomfort. Clicking her tongue in a much sharper tone than my teasing tsk, she huffed with her face twisted in disdainful disagreement, "You think too highly of her. She was possessed by an unholy desire for more magical power and lost my father in the process."

I couldn't resist pushing further, sensing something was about to break. Would I finally solve the mystery?

"The greater the loss, the greater the gain," I insisted, rising to my feet, stepping close, looming over her. Once again, she seemed unaffected despite my attempts to intimidate, flatter or impress â€" still gazing somewhere behind me, refusing to rise to the bait. "Perhaps she took those two boys in out of regret..."

A finger whipped out of nowhere, pressing firmly against my lips, warm and gentle. A pair of ebony eyes glittered behind it, a curved smile of restored humor gracing her beautiful face. Leaning forward, suddenly invading my space, she giggled a little darkly and warned in a firm tone, "Enough of this."

Shocked by the rebuke, I stared down, gut clenching instinctively at the sudden threat in her tone, the aggressiveness in her stance. She gazed up, mask fallen and shattered, the doll-like puppet facade shed in the face of my torment.

I'd lost my taste for the game in the face of her defiance.

"Ultear... your... face."

The spell was broken between us. A heart belly laugh worked its way from my core as she wailed, clutching her face, forcing the unwelcome thoughts of my surprise submission and unresolved questions out of my mind.

It would only be for a little longer, and then, then I would be done with her, and any stray words whispered between us would be ashes of the past.

End
file.